

EXPLORING THE EDGE: SEARCHING FOR WILDERNESS
IN DESOLATION AND GRAY CANYONS

by

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STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

Exploring the Edge: Searching for Wilderness in Desolation and Gray Canyons

looks at the difference between legal and experienced wilderness. Legal wilderness is that wilderness defined by the 1964 Wilderness Act and the wilderness mandate in the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act as well as the court cases that worked out the details of legal wilderness. Experienced wilderness is that wilderness which is defined by and through our individual and personal experiences. I explore this difference by first focusing on legal wilderness and then on experienced wilderness—specifically, my experienced wilderness.

The wilderness discussion in the paper focuses on Desolation Canyon, a river section managed by the Bureau of Land Management to protect its wilderness characteristics, which flow through the heart of the Uinta Basin. In the first half of the paper, I look at the history of the development of wilderness as an idea, the origins of legal wilderness (*The Wilderness Act* and *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*), the court cases that directly affected wilderness implementation and definition, and the federal offices responsible for implementing wilderness. In the second part of the paper I explore, through photos and journal entries, my experienced wilderness—the ideas about wilderness that I personally hold as a result of multiple river trips I took down Desolation and Gray Canyons in the summer and fall of 2011. I conclude that although the wilderness definition, identification, and protection procedures the Bureau of Land

Management utilizes are not perfect or all inclusive of my wilderness ideal, those procedures do protect a beautiful, wild stretch of river from over exploitation. That protection opens up the ability for exploration and personal wilderness definition.

Candy Holland.

Without Mom's permissions over the years,
this never would have happened.

A peregrine dancing,
hovering above the changing cottonwoods'
yellow flecked green leaves, fluttering in the cool breeze.

The clouds rolling over and down the snowdusted canyon rims.
The sun bursting through the cloud bank
luring me from my tent for a brief walk
in the cottonwood grove shimmering beyond the beach.

The idea to do a river trip
in mid-October
by myself
with snow in the forecast.

Wild,
the root of wilderness.

Wilderness,
with so many meanings
a person need only throw a stone to hit one.

Wilderness
that changes with the season,
with the individual,
with the political party in power.

Power,
the root cause of wilderness.
The protector of wilderness.

Humans,
who wield the power.
The inventors, the deciders, the protectors of wilderness.

ME.

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CHAPTER 1

SHARP EDGES, SMOOTH CURVES: LEGAL AND EXPERIENCED WILDERNESS

There are no sharp edges in the desert. Between the rain, the sedimentary rock, and wind, everything smoothes down to a curve. Ideas about wilderness are no different. Our personal beliefs and experiences determine how we each individually approach land, including land that has been legally protected as wilderness. Like desert rock, these ideas weather and smooth down through the course of time and experience. This thesis explores the differences between the sharp edges of legal wilderness—that wilderness protected by *The Wilderness Act*¹ and the Bureau of Land Management's wilderness mandate stated in *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*²—and the smooth curve of experienced wilderness—the individual and unique feelings and ideas that you and I and everybody hold concerning wilderness and which, through new experiences, can change.

This is an exploration of wilderness—the Bureau of Land Management's wilderness, Desolation and Gray Canyons' wilderness, my wilderness. In October 2011, I ran Desolation and Gray Canyons (two canyons located on the Green River as it flows

¹ *The Wilderness Act*, Public Law 88-577, 3 September 1964.

² *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, Public Law 94-579, 21 October 1976 as amended through 7 May 2001.

through the Uintah Basin in Utah), legally managed by the Bureau of Land Management to protect their wilderness characteristics, in order to explore ideas surrounding wilderness. I spent eight days on a solo river trip. I wrote in my journal daily, sometimes twice a day, recording what I experienced, saw, felt, absorbed, and encountered.

In the first part of the thesis I explore the wilderness of *The Wilderness Act* of 1964 and *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*—legal wilderness. The journey through legal wilderness begins in Chapter 2, with a discussion of the governments and agencies involved in regulation of and land-use issues in Desolation. Chapter 3 is an introduction to wilderness and its historical foundations and explores the original ideas surrounding wilderness. Chapter 4 continues with an in depth look at how *The Wilderness Act* and *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act* became modern wilderness protection. I do this through a detailed survey and explanation of the acts themselves and the government documents and court cases surrounding federal wilderness protection. Chapter 4 ends with a discussion of Desolation Canyon's ongoing path to permanent wilderness protection.

Chapter 5 is the bridge between the legal discussion of wilderness and an exploration of my own experienced wilderness. In Chapter 5, I explore the human factor of wilderness definition delineating but not separating legal wilderness and personal, experienced wilderness. In the second half of the paper, Chapters 6 through 20, I set out my individual and experienced wilderness conception. I do this through journal entries I wrote on my trips and photos taken during the various trips in 2011. This changes the personality of the text which is in-line with the difference between legal wilderness and experienced wilderness.

Wilderness needs the sharp edges of legal protection in order to withstand the exploitation of us. But, those sharp edges must be balanced with the smooth curve of personal definition and exploration. Legal wilderness creates that opportunity by protecting lands from development and change, which allows individuals to learn wilderness for themselves.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHECKERBOARD: LAND USE DESIGNATIONS IN DESOLATION CANYON

The put-in for a river trip down Desolation and Gray Canyons (referred to as Deso by river runners such as myself) is about a two-hour drive off U.S. Highway 40 in the northeast corner of Utah. From Highway 40 until I reach the put-in, I traverse Bureau of Land Management land, travelling down wash-boarded dirt roads, past empty beer cans, abandoned chip bags, and old sheep herder cairns. I join a steady progression of big rigs full of fracking material as I drive deep into the Uinta Basin, an empty, grey and yellow tinged, brown landscape checker boarded like a gingham tablecloth with oil and natural gas rigs popping and chugging away.

In contrast to the drive to the put-in, a river trip is one of solitude and silence—canyon walls of deep reds, browns, and yellows; rock art, Fremont granaries, and abandoned homesteads; calm water reflecting the palette of the desert and rapids, white and roiling.¹ The Green River in Deso connects the Uinta Basin with the canyons and lands to the south, bridging one desert to another, and the river travelled passes through

¹ The Fremont Indians were the primary human population living in Desolation and Gray Canyons from AD 1000-1300. They used the side canyons and river bottoms as farm and hunting land and left granaries tucked into caves and rock art decorating the walls of side canyons and the main drainage. There are two different types of rock art, petroglyphs and pictographs. Petroglyphs are pecked into the wall and pictographs are pictures painted on the wall, sometimes within petroglyphs, sometimes alone. James M. Aton, *The River Knows Everything: Desolation Canyon and the Green* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2009), 43-47. For a more general idea of the Fremont, see David B. Madsen, *Exploring the Fremont* (Salt Lake City: Utah Museum of Natural History, 1989).

various land designations each with its own management laws and goals. Starting at the put-in, mile 95.8, the river corridor is managed by the Bureau of Land Management to protect the wilderness and recreation characteristics of the river running experience. The Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Area² extends along the right bank from river mile 79 down to the take-out at river mile 12 and The Wilderness Study Area extends far beyond the right bank and includes much more land than can be seen from the river, but the river is the most visited, most used part of the whole Wilderness Study Area.³ The left bank is Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation land and managed by their tribal government.

The combination of Reservation and Bureau of Land Management land means that different agencies and governments with different goals jointly manage the land on either side of the river. The river is managed by the Bureau of Land Management through the *Desolation and Gray Canyons of the Green River River Management Plan*.⁴ In 1976,

² A Wilderness Study Area is a Federal land designation indicating that a particular Federal land holding has been awarded a preliminary determination of wilderness eligibility. With this preliminary designation, the Bureau of Land Management is required to protect those wilderness characteristics until Congress makes the final decision on the wilderness qualifications of the land. This process will be addressed more in depth later on in this paper.

³ The *Statewide Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement* estimates the recreation use of the Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Area “at 70,000 visitor days annually. Of this amount, 60,000 visitor days are attributed to water-based recreation controlled by Bureau of Land Management’s permit system in Desolation and Gray canyons of the Green River.” Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Utah Bureau of Land Management Statewide Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement*, vol. VI, *East-Central Region*, “Desolation Canyon WSA,” (Salt Lake City, UT: The Office, 1990), 44.

Duwin Whitis, *Guide to the Green River in Desolation and Gray Canyons* (Buda, Texas: RiverMaps, LLC., 2009), maps 1, 3, and 12. For the formal description of the Wilderness Study Area see *Utah Bureau of Land Management Statewide Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement*, vol. VI, *East-Central Region*, “Desolation Canyon WSA,” 5.

River miles in Deso are measured going upstream from the Denver and Rio Grande Western (now Union Pacific) railroad bridge that crosses the Green River below Green River State Park in Green River, Utah. Plan and Profile of Green River, Green River, Utah, to Green River, Wyoming, 1:81,680 (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Geological Survey, 1924), sheet A. The bridge is river mile 0 and the put-in is 95.8 miles upstream at the mouth of Sand Wash.

⁴ Wilderness, according to the *River Management Plan*, “refers to the type of recreational experience the visitor may encounter while traveling through Desolation and Gray Canyons.” Robert Barry and others, *Desolation and Gray Canyons of the Green River River Management Plan* (Price, Utah: Price River Resource Area, Moab District, Bureau of Land Management, 1979), 6.

after the passage of *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*,⁵ the Bureau of Land Management created the *River Management Plan* to manage the “visual corridor” of the Green River through Deso. The plan defines the visual corridor as “generally ... limited to what can be seen or heard from the river” and the corridor ranges from one to two miles wide from the put-in at Sand Wash to the take-out at Swaseys Boat Ramp.⁶ Even though the whole canyon is not protected as a wilderness study area, one of the main goals of the *River Management Plan* is to protect the wilderness experience of river visitors because “a person can have a wilderness type, recreational experience even though the area is not officially designated a Wilderness Area.”⁷

In order to better understand how people felt about their “wilderness type, recreational experience” in Deso, the Bureau of Land Management quantified through a survey what the majority of visitors believed were appropriate population levels that would maintain a “quality wilderness experience.”⁸ The survey, conducted by the Institute for the Study of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism at Utah State University in 1976, showed that “82% of the people contacted considered Desolation and Gray canyons a wilderness area” and “many of these people considered this as one of the

⁵ The Bureau of Land Management was actually created in 1946 when the General Land Office and the Grazing Service were combined. It was not, however, until 1976 and the passage of *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act* that the Bureau of Land Management was given any “statutory authority.” The statutory authority finally provided the Bureau of Land Management with the ability to regulate the lands it oversaw. This authority includes a wilderness mandate. Gary C. Bryner, *U.S. Land and Natural Resources Policy: A Public Issues Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 76.

⁶ Barry, *River Management Plan*, 6. Sand Wash is located at mile 95.8 and Swaseys is at river mile 11.9. Whitis, *Guide to the Green River in Desolation and Gray Canyons*, see maps 1 and 12.

⁷ Barry, *River Management Plan*, 6.

⁸ Barry, *River Management Plan*, 20.

values they were seeking when making their trip.”⁹ In addition to limiting the number of visitors to the canyon, the Bureau of Land Management also ended oil and gas exploration and took other actions to protect the wilderness characteristics and recreational resources the survey participants valued in a trip down Deso.¹⁰

In its management of the left bank, the Tribe has to follow the same environmental laws as the Bureau of Land Management, but their records and decisions remain private.¹¹ In 2000, President William Clinton awarded the Ute Indian Tribe 89,000 acres of former Naval Oil Shale Reserve land east of Sand Wash.¹² The land award is conditioned by a requirement that a one-quarter mile corridor from the river be managed in such a way as to protect those wilderness characteristics determined by the survey for the *River Management Plan*.¹³ In the mid-1980s the tribe adopted a two-part plan for their lands bordering the Green River through Deso. It manages the northern half as a “sensitive religious and cultural area” and the southern half as a “wilderness and wildlife area.” With the economy and dollar returns surrounding oil shale and natural gas exploration rising, it is unknown how the Tribe will change its management of its Deso holding. No matter how the Ute Indian Tribe manages their autonomous lands, they have to manage this corridor in such a way as to protect wilderness.¹⁴

⁹ Barry, *River Management Plan*, 13, E-1—E-3, 20.

¹⁰ Barry, *River Management Plan*, 25, 27, 29. These include limiting motorized travel, trying to get Wild and Scenic River protection for the canyons, and limiting people to one trip per year.

¹¹ Aton, *The River Knows Everything*, 154.

¹² This Naval Oil Shale Reserve land is rich in fossil fuel and were held in reserve for the military. U.S. Department of Energy, “Naval Petroleum Reserves—Profile” <http://fossil.energy.gov/programs/reserves/npr/> (accessed 29 October 2012).

¹³ Aton, *The River Knows Everything*, 171.

¹⁴ Aton, *The River Knows Everything*, 171.

CHAPTER 3

CREATING WILDERNESS: ECHO PARK AND THE PASSAGE OF THE WILDERNESS ACT

The “wilderness characteristics” the the *River Management Plan* protects are part of federal land management because of *The Wilderness Act*. The Act was both a culmination of and stepping stone into modern environmentalism and land protection. But it did not happen overnight. The development of what we refer to today as wilderness is largely a result of a battle over the sanctity of national park service lands and monuments fought in Dinosaur National Monument.

In the 1940s, the Bureau of Reclamation drew up plans for a massive water storage project within the Colorado River drainage system,¹ portions of which Congress later adopted in the Colorado River Storage Project Act.² Two of the ten proposed dams were to be built on the Green River within Dinosaur National Monument—at that time a fairly unknown unit of the National Park Service located in the northeast corner of Utah and the northwest corner of Colorado.³ What the Bureau of Reclamation did not count on

¹ The Colorado River drainage system is all of the tributaries that that flow into the Colorado River. The Green River is one of the main tributaries to the system. For the description of the full project see United States, Bureau of Reclamation, *The Colorado River: A Natural Menace Becomes a National Resource* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1946).

² *The Colorado River Storage Project Act*, Chapter 203, Public Law 485, 11 April 1956.

³ Mark W. T. Harvey, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 52.

was a Sierra Club still smarting from the loss of the Hetch Hetchy Valley in California and unwilling, under any circumstances, to lose another unit of the National Park Service to drowning.⁴ The battle in Dinosaur, referred to as the Echo Park controversy, galvanized a diverse group of people into the wilderness advocates and environmental activists we know today.⁵

The Bureau of Reclamation went up against the full force of post World War II recreation when “rising standards of living and greater mobility had made the [national] parks substantially more popular” than during the Hetch Hetchy controversy.⁶ The dams in Dinosaur National Monument—Echo Park and Split Mountain—were defeated on April 11, 1956, when they were not included in the Colorado River Storage Project Act. According to Roderick Frazier Nash, this was wilderness protection’s “finest hour to that date” because it was “the development of a convincing justification for the existence of wild country” backed by a growing population of “Americans who subscribed to it.”⁷ This increase in popularity, especially among the most vocal members, added new

⁴ In 1906 San Francisco was shattered by an earthquake that resulted in catastrophic fires that burned down most of the city. The City of San Francisco pressured the Department of the Interior to allow it to build a dam in the Hetch Hetchy Valley—part of Yosemite National Park. John Muir and the relatively new Sierra Club fought for both the sanctity of the valley and the preservation of the National Park wilderness protection ideal as they attempted to prevent approval of the dam. Eventually, however, the wise-use movement and the City of San Francisco won the battle and, in 1913, President Woodrow Wilson approved construction of the O’Shaunessy dam which flooded Hetch Hetchy Valley. This contest was “the first time in the American experience the competing claims of wilderness and civilization to a specific area received a thorough hearing before a national audience.” See Chapter 10 “Hetch Hetchy” in Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 162 for the quotation.

⁵ Harvey, *Symbol of Wilderness*, 270, 52.

⁶ Harvey, *Symbol of Wilderness*, 270, 57.

⁷ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 219.

political weight to preservationism and was the push needed to create a national wilderness policy.⁸

The campaign for wilderness was largely spearheaded by the director of the Wilderness Society at the time, Howard Zahniser.⁹ Zahniser decided to lasso the momentum created by the Echo Park victory and attempt to shepherd a wilderness protection bill through Congress. While land has been formally designated as wilderness since 1924, Douglas Scott notes those designations were “entirely at the discretion of agency administrators who could change their own minds just as new presidents and new political currents change the administrators.”¹⁰ That meant, according to Gary C. Bryner, “wilderness areas that were preserved in those early years were exceedingly fragile and endangered.”¹¹ Environmental leaders and wilderness advocates knew that, in order to provide more permanent and stable wilderness protection, it was necessary to create an overarching federal system of legal protection for wilderness that protected land “unimpaired for future use and enjoyment.”¹² Finding a definition of wilderness that

⁸ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 219, 200. Preservationists “often see the value of public lands much greater if protected against commercial developments, aesthetic, and even spiritual purposes.” Conservationists, on the other hand, “recogniz[e] the importance of resource production but call for sustainable yield and careful control over harvesting to ensure that resources are not depleted faster than nature can regenerate them.” Gary C. Bryner, *U.S. Land and Natural Resources Policy: A Public Issues Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 27.

⁹ Nash quotes a 1935 Wilderness Society pamphlet explaining its founding principles: “for the purpose of fighting off invasion of the wilderness and of stimulating ... an appreciation of its multiform emotional, intellectual, and scientific values.”

Howard Zahniser was Director of the Wilderness Society during the Echo Park Dam controversy and worked along with David Brower, Director of the Sierra Club, and others in the defense of Dinosaur National Monument. See Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 207, 212.

¹⁰ Douglas Scott, “The American Story,” in *For the Conservation of Earth*, ed. Vance Martin (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum, Inc., 1988), 203.

¹¹ Bryner, *U.S. Land and Natural Resources Policy*, 246.

¹² *The Wilderness Act*, Public Law 88-577, 3 September 1964, § 2(a). Each wilderness is “managed by the federal agency responsible for the lands before their wilderness designation: the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service.” Bryner, *U.S. Land and Natural Resources Policy*, 250.

could pass both houses took eight years and “nine separate hearings on the proposal, collecting over six thousand pages of testimony,” which resulted in sixty-six revisions and rewrites of the bill until President Lyndon B. Johnson was finally able to sign *The Wilderness Act* into law in 1964.¹³

¹³ For the quotation see Scott, “The American Story,” 204. For a general discussion of the passage of *The Wilderness Act* see Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 222, 226; and Thomas G. Smith, *Green Republican: John Saylor and the Preservation of America's Wilderness* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), Chapter 9, “Passage of the Wilderness Bill.”

CHAPTER 4

THE WILDERNESS ACT: PROTECTING BOTH THE IDEAL AND REALITY

The wilderness protected by *The Wilderness Act* and the newly created National Wilderness Preservation System gave “wild country unprecedented national recognition as a desirable component of the American landscape.”¹ But the Act was a political compromise that defined wilderness as pristine and protected *as well as* available for resource development.² This compromise is apparent when the definition of wilderness in section 2(c) of *The Wilderness Act*, attributed by J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson to Zahniser, is compared to the “Special Provisions” found in section 4(d). Section 2(c) states that:

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an

¹ Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 200.

² Thomas R. Vale, *The American Wilderness: Reflections on Nature Protection in the United States* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 125.

unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.³

This definition is followed by the “Special Provisions” found in section 4(d) that ensure exceptions to preserving the natural conditions of wilderness idealized in 2(c).

The 4(d) provisions allow the continued use of aircraft and motorboats where they were already used; hard rock mining and prospecting “in a manner compatible with the preservation of the wilderness environment;” water project development; and grazing.⁴ “Wilderness designation,” according to environmental philosopher Mark Woods, “does more than merely tolerate ‘exceptions’ to wilderness preservation. The very language used to designate wilderness—how wilderness is legally defined—further stipulates requirements for how wilderness may be developed and trammelled by humans.”⁵ Those special provisions mean that wilderness is more compromise than ideal protection, which results in a law rife with its own complications and aparent contradictions.⁶

These contradictions can either be seen as ways that more land could be set aside and protected or reasons that *The Wilderness Act* is an unenforceable irony. Yet, if wilderness is to be untrammelled as well as developable, as seen in sections 2(c) and 4(d), then *The Wilderness Act* protects both the ideal and the reality. For environmental historian William Cronon, wilderness (especially that wilderness found in section 2(c)) is

³ J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, “Introduction,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 3; *The Wilderness Act*, Public Law 88-577, 3 September 1964, § 2(c).

⁴ *The Wilderness Act*, § 4(d)(1-4).

⁵ Mark Woods, “Federal Wilderness Preservation in the United States: The Preservation of Wilderness?” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 148.

⁶ Vale, *The American Wilderness*, 136.

“very much the fantasy of people who have never themselves had to work the land to make a living” because “only people whose relation to that land was already alienated could hold up wilderness as a model for human life in nature, for the romantic ideology of wilderness leaves precisely nowhere for human beings actually to make their living from the land.”⁷

This is partly because, at its base, *The Wilderness Act* is legal protection for what its framers valued as their personal and perceived ideas of what wilderness was. Definitions that were, according to Nash and Cronon, based on the otherness of wilderness; of a wilderness that provided an escape from their modern society.⁸ The environmental activists and legislators who steered *The Wilderness Act* through Congress seized a rare opportunity to protect some of the attitudes and values they had assigned to wilderness. The protection of these specific wilderness values was not arbitrary but a result of what wilderness advocates and Congress felt they could protect and pass at that time.

In 1946, Congress decided that the remaining public lands of the United States not designated as national forests (managed by the Forest Service), national parks (managed by the National Park Service), or wildlife refuges (managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service) be corralled and combined with the General Land Office under the newly formed Bureau of Land Management. It was not until 1976 that the BLM received its

⁷ William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), 80.

⁸ Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 69-80; Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Chapters 4 and 12.

multiple use management mandate with *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*.⁹ Only after 1976 could Bureau of Land Management lands, including Deso, qualify as wilderness as defined by *The Wilderness Act*. When *The Wilderness Act* was signed into law it only applied to “national forests and units of the national park and wildlife refuge systems.”¹⁰ Sections 102 and 103 of *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act* designate the Bureau of Land Management as a multiple use agency that must look at wilderness, the same wilderness defined by section 2(c) of *The Wilderness Act*, as one of those multiple uses it must protect and manage for.¹¹

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act directs the Bureau of Land Management to study the wilderness characteristics of all its land holdings and start the process of setting aside those lands that qualify for wilderness designation.¹² The Bureau of Land Management determines an area’s wilderness characteristics in its Wilderness Review Process, a three-step process that results in the Bureau of Land Management nominating and Congress deciding if a particular area qualifies as designated wilderness and for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.¹³

⁹ *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, Public Law 94-579, 21 October 1976 as amended through 7 May 2001.

¹⁰ *The Wilderness Act*, § 4(a).

¹¹ *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, § 102(7), 103(i), 102(8).

¹² *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, § 102, 103, 603.

¹³ *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, § 603(a).

Section 603(a) gives a time frame for the inventory required by section 201(a) of *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*. Fifteen years after *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act* passed “the Secretary [of the Interior] shall review those roadless areas of 5,000 acres or more and roadless islands of the public lands, identified during the inventory required by section 201(a) of this Act as having wilderness characteristics described in *The Wilderness Act* of 1964 ...” Roadless is defined in the *Wilderness Inventory Handbook* as “refer(ing) to the absence of roads which have been improved and maintained by mechanical means to insure relatively regular and continuous use. A way maintained solely by the passage of vehicles does not constitute a road.” United States, Bureau of Land Management, *Wilderness Inventory Handbook: Policy, Direction, Procedures, and Guidance for Conducting*

While *The Wilderness Act* and *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act* did set out a specific definition of wilderness, it did not, however, explain how that definition should be implemented. The legal definition continues to be interpreted by the agencies, courts, and Congresses that enforce, determine, and define the particulars of wilderness designation. With “the courts [...] becom[ing] involved for a variety of reasons including ... [deciding] legitimate differences of opinion over the law’s provisions and [clarifying] uncertainty about congressional intentions.”¹⁴ As a result of the courts involvement and the lack of implementation direction, the details of legal wilderness designation have largely been determined through court cases and agency policies.

The first part of the definition of wilderness in *The Wilderness Act*—that wilderness is an area “untrammeled by man” and of “undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character ... without permanent improvements”¹⁵—originally led the Forest Service to adopt what has been termed the “purity definition” of wilderness. The Forest Service decided that “lands previously impacted by humans in any way could no longer be considered as candidates for wilderness designation,” with previously impacted referring to any land with a road or that has been logged or lived in.¹⁶

Cronon in “The Trouble with Wilderness” concludes that there is nowhere on earth *unaffected* by humans. He argues that “in fact, everything we know about

Wilderness Inventory on the Public Lands (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 1978), 5.

¹⁴ John C. Hendee, George H. Stankey, and Robert C. Lucas, *Wilderness Management*, Misc. Publication no. 1365 (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 1978), 110.

¹⁵ *The Wilderness Act*, § 2(c).

¹⁶ Woods, “The Preservation of Wilderness?” 135-136. In the first inventory of roadless areas after the passage of *The Wilderness Act*, the Forest Service strictly adhered to the purity definition of wilderness and only recommended 235 roadless areas (approximately 12.3 million acres) as having wilderness characteristics out of a possible 1,448 roadless areas (56 million acres).

environmental history suggests that people have been manipulating the natural world on various scales for as long as we have a record of their passing.”¹⁷ Therefore, if we follow section 2(c) of *The Wilderness Act* strictly, which led the Forest Service to its purity definition, then there is no wilderness.

On the one hand, because of section 2(c), a strict reading of the definition of wilderness is excusable, in fact, logical. But, with the addition of the special provisions within section 4(d) such a pure definition of wilderness as without human evidence or effect becomes impossible. The purity ideal of wilderness was rejected by a federal district court in *Parker v. United States* when it granted an injunction that prevented the awarding of a timber contract to log the East Meadow Creek Area of the White River National Forest in Colorado.¹⁸ The court maintained that the East Meadow Creek Area needed to be studied for its wilderness suitability before it could be logged. The Forest Service argued that the area could be logged because there were already two roads: an access road and a now-unused road built in the 1950s to fight a bark beetle infestation. According to the Forest Service, the roads meant the area was no longer pure. The court, however, decided that the access road was “substantially unnoticeable from approximately 100 yards away” and the other road was unused and growing over, thus the court determined that neither road prevented the area from being studied for its wilderness suitability.¹⁹

The *Parker v. United States* decision created a “forward-looking” definition of wilderness which meant that purity was not the sole defining characteristic of

¹⁷ Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 83.

¹⁸ *Parker v. United States*, 309 F.Supp. 593, 600 (D.Colo. 1970).

¹⁹ Woods, “The Preservation of Wilderness?” 150, note 9.

wilderness.²⁰ In fact, it brought section 2(c) and 4(d) more in line with each other. This new, more flexible conception allowed for the possibility that “untrammelledness can re-emerge in spite of past and current human interferences” and that “naturalness is conditioned by future possibilities as well as past causalities.”²¹ In other words, what is defined as wilderness does not necessarily depend on the past; wilderness is the preservation of the now for the potential of the future which allows the land to become more wild as time passes.²²

The Act also defines wilderness as in the eyes of the beholder where wilderness “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.”²³ Required for wilderness designation, this “perceptual condition of naturalness” is entirely up to the judgement of the observer.²⁴ It was this perception that the Bureau of Land Management attempted to quantify and protect with the survey it took before creating Desolation and Gray Canyon’s *River Management Plan* discussed previously.

The “forward-looking” definition of wilderness and the idea of a perceptual condition of naturalness is why Deso can still be defined as wilderness even though there is evidence of “man” all over the place, especially if you look hard enough. The forward-

²⁰ Woods, “The Preservation of Wilderness?” 137. This antipurity decision was echoed in the passage of *The Eastern Wilderness Act* in 1975 which allowed previously logged forests in the eastern United States to be considered for wilderness designation.

²¹ Woods, “The Preservation of Wilderness?” 140, 138.

²² In *Wilderness Management*, the authors say that “not to be confused with *untrampled*, *untrammelled* means ‘not subject to human controls and manipulations that hamper the free play of natural forces,’ 68 [emphasis in original]. Woods in “The Preservation of Wilderness?” defines primeval as those lands “without permanent improvements or human habitation,” 135.

²³ *The Wilderness Act*, § 2(1).

²⁴ Woods, “The Preservation of Wilderness?” 140.

looking slant of the wilderness definition means that you have to look hard to find the no longer used roads and the boats long ago left under overhangs. The Indian gardens that filled the granaries and the homesteads are no longer farmed. The area is returning to a state of naturalness and thus qualifies as wilderness.

Another part of the wilderness definition in *The Wilderness Act* requires that the area “ha[ve] outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.”²⁵ Two people, however, may have entirely different definitions of both solitude and appropriate types of “primitive and unconfined” recreation. The Bureau of Land Management interpreted this requirement as an either/or scenario in its *Wilderness Inventory Handbook*, stating that “an inventory unit must provide and be managed to maintain an outstanding opportunity for an individual to experience *either* solitude *or* a nonmotorized and nondeveloped type of recreation.”²⁶ This does not mean that solitude or nonmotorized nondeveloped types of recreation are mutually exclusive. Instead, it makes it possible for the Bureau of Land Management to accept land as wilderness that does not have both present. The *Handbook* continues, admitting that “good judgments will be required” to decide if something has outstanding opportunities for “solitude” defining it as “the state of being alone or remote from others; isolation. A lonely or secluded place.” Furthermore, solitude can be achieved through the combination of “factors or elements ... [which] may include size, natural screening, and ability of the user to find a secluded spot.”²⁷ Jay Hansford C. Vest, in his article “The Philosophical Significance of Wilderness Solitude” takes issue with this “artifactual” definition of solitude. Vest writes

²⁵ *The Wilderness Act*, § 2(c)(2).

²⁶ Bureau of Land Management, *Wilderness Inventory Handbook*, 13 [emphasis added].

²⁷ Bureau of Land Management, *Wilderness Inventory Handbook*, 13.

that wilderness as defined in *The Wilderness Act* “is not a scientific statement of managerial technology, but a Congressional mandate reflecting a rich heritage of value,” (i.e., those values of the politicians who wrote and passed *The Wilderness Act*).²⁸

When it comes to the opportunities for “primitive and unconfined type[s] of recreation”²⁹ that must be assessed along with opportunities for solitude in order for land to qualify as wilderness, the *Handbook* states that “an area may possess outstanding opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation either through the diversity in the number of primitive and unconfined recreational activities possible in the inventory unit or the outstanding quality of one opportunity.”³⁰ It also includes a long list of examples of these types of recreation.³¹ Woods points out that “because someone could probably engage in at least *some* form of primitive recreation within any given wilderness area, federal agencies may be hard-pressed to prove that any given area lacks outstanding *opportunities* for primitive recreation.”³²

Along with the wilderness characteristics above, size also determines if something can qualify as legal wilderness. Under *The Wilderness Act*, an area in question must “ha[ve] at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable

²⁸ Jay Hansford C. Vest, “The Philosophical Significance of Wilderness Solitude,” *Environmental Ethics* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 330 and 304.

²⁹ *The Wilderness Act*, § 2(c)(2).

³⁰ Bureau of Land Management, *Wilderness Inventory Handbook*, 14.

³¹ The examples include: “hiking, backpacking, fishing, hunting, spelunking, horseback riding, mountain or rock climbing, river running, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, dog sledding, photography, bird watching, canoeing, kayaking, sailing, and sight seeing for botanical, zoological, or geological features.” Bureau of Land Management, *Wilderness Inventory Handbook*, 13. See also Gary C. Bryner, *U.S. Land and Natural Resources Policy: A Public Issues Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 250.

³² Woods, “The Preservation of Wilderness?” 144 [emphasis in original].

its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition.”³³ This meant that all roadless areas of 5,000 acres or more had to be reviewed for wilderness characteristics and potential in the inventory stage of the review process.³⁴

The last part of the definition of wilderness in *The Wilderness Act* explains all of the other “supplemental values” that “may” qualify an area as wilderness. Land “may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historical value” according to section 2(c)(4) of *The Wilderness Act*.³⁵ The Bureau of Land Management took section 2(c)(4) and made it a part of the characteristics that needed to be assessed in a wilderness review but were incidental to the three “key factors of wilderness characteristics” —size, apparent naturalness and *either* opportunities for solitude *or* primitive and unconfined recreational opportunities.³⁶ The *Handbook* further explains that these additional qualifying values “are not required for wilderness but it is

³³ *The Wilderness Act*, § 2(c)(3).

³⁴ Bureau of Land Management, *Wilderness Inventory Handbook*, 6, 8. Many of the specifics of the size requirements of the Bureau of Land Management wilderness policy were decided in Interior Board of Land Appeals administrative courts. After the Bureau of Land Management made a decision in the inventory process, a person or group could protest the decision to the Bureau of Land Management office the decision came from and then, if they were unhappy with that response, the protestant could appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals. A protestant, unhappy with the Interior Board of Land Appeals decision, can appeal to the federal district court with jurisdiction over the area. See Ricky Torrey, “The Wilderness Inventory of the Public Lands: Purity, Pressure, and Procedure,” *Journal of Energy, Natural Resources and Environmental Law* 12, no. 2 (1992): 460-461. *Tri-County Cattlemen’s Association* addressed size requirements of Bureau of Land Management wilderness study areas and the Interior Board of Land Appeals found “that section 603(a) of *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, does not mandate wilderness review of non-island areas of roadless public land of less than 5,000 contiguous acres.” See *Tri-County Cattlemen’s Ass’n*, 60 I.B.L.A. 305, 314 (1981). The Interior Board of Land Appeals court’s decision, however, seems to go against the *Wilderness Inventory Handbook*. According to the publication, an area can qualify as wilderness even if it is roadless and less than 5,000 acres if the land in question connects to other federal agency lands with designated wilderness values or designated potential wilderness values, the public wants wilderness preservation of the area [which seemed to be what the Bureau of Land Management found in Robert Barry and others, *Desolation and Gray Canyons of the Green River River Management Plan* (Price, Utah: Price River Resource Area, Moab District, Bureau of Land Management, 1979)], or if a Bureau of Land Management area of less than 5,000 acres is connected to another federal agency’s land of less than 5,000 acres and the combined total of both is 5,000 acres or more. But nobody appealed the decision of the Interior Board of Land Appeals courts so no area less than 5,000 acres was included in the inventory stage of the Bureau of Land Management’s Wilderness Review Process.

³⁵ *The Wilderness Act*, § 2(c)(4).

³⁶ Bureau of Land Management, *Wilderness Inventory Handbook*, 6.

important that their presence be noted and considered in assessing the wilderness potential of a unit.” The Bureau of Land Management employees on the ground doing the inventory need to describe the “relative quantity and quality of” these values, but “lacking all or any of the supplemental values will probably not drop an inventory unit from consideration. However, the presence of these values will enhance an area’s wilderness quality.”³⁷

The Bureau of Land Management’s *Wilderness Inventory Handbook* explains, both to the public and the Bureau’s employees, the official guidelines for the Wilderness Inventory Process: inventory, study, and recommendation.³⁸ In the first step of the review, the inventory process, the Bureau of Land Management surveys all its land holdings and determines whether the areas satisfy the wilderness requirements of *The Wilderness Act*. Those areas that the Bureau of Land Management finds meet those requirements become wilderness study areas.

The second stage, the “study” phase, considers all the values, resources, and uses of each wilderness study area to determine if those areas actually qualify for wilderness designation and so should be closed to other “multiple use” development. In this phase the Bureau of Land Management prepares a thorough wilderness-specific Environmental Impact Statement as well as holds numerous public meetings to make a final determination about an area’s suitability for wilderness designation.

³⁷ Bureau of Land Management, *Wilderness Inventory Handbook*, 14.

³⁸ The Wilderness Inventory Process is mandated by *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, § 603(a). The guidelines are set out in Bureau of Land Management, *Wilderness Inventory Handbook*.

In the final stage of the Wilderness Review Process, the recommendation stage, the Bureau of Land Management recommends to the Secretary of the Interior for or against a wilderness designation. The Secretary then looks at the wilderness Environmental Impact Statement and a mineral survey of the area provided by the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Bureau of Mines to finally decide whether a wilderness study area should be recommended as suitable wilderness to the President. The President then decides whether the wilderness study area should be recommended to Congress for the final vote on suitability and inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.³⁹

Furthermore, *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act* provides that all lands reviewed and approved as having “wilderness characteristics described in *The Wilderness Act*” and that the Secretary thought suitable (regardless of whether they have been given final Congressional approval) must be managed in a way that protects those wilderness characteristics that qualified the land as wilderness originally.⁴⁰ Essentially, once a piece of land (say the right bank of Deso) was found suitable “for preservation as wilderness” (which it was) the Secretary of the Interior has to “manage such lands...in a manner so as not to impair the suitability of such areas for preservation as wilderness” until a vote in Congress.⁴¹

³⁹ *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, § 603(a); Bureau of Land Management, *Statewide Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement*, vol. VI, “Desolation Canyon WSA,” 29; Bureau of Land Management, *Wilderness Inventory Handbook*, 3.

⁴⁰ *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, § 603(c), 603(a).

⁴¹ *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, § 603(c).

The Bureau of Land Management has almost completed with the Wilderness Review Process of the Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Area. In 1990, the Utah Bureau of Land Management finished the second stage, the study stage, of the Wilderness Inventory Process of the Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Area by publishing the *Utah Bureau of Land Management Statewide Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement* which included the qualifications of the Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Area. In the *Final Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement*, the Bureau of Land Management determined that at 290,845 acres, “the size, configuration, topography, and vegetation of the wilderness study area enhance opportunities for solitude” and that “the entire WSA [Wilderness Study Area] is very well suited for a diversity of outstanding primitive recreation.”⁴² While supplemental values neither make nor break a potential wilderness area, the Bureau of Land Management determined that the Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Area “has a substantial number of important features” (i.e., supplemental values) including, but not limited to, high elevation, water, remoteness, bighorn habitat, canyon desert and high mountain environments, archaeology, and predators.⁴³ That Deso has made it this far in the wilderness qualifying process reinforces the discoveries of the *River Management Plan* in the 1970s and the combination assures the protection of Deso’s wilderness characteristics until the Secretary of the Interior, the President, and Congress all decide on their recommendations of suitability.⁴⁴

⁴² Bureau of Land Management, *Statewide Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement*, vol. VI, “Desolation Canyon WSA,” 25-26.

⁴³ Bureau of Land Management, *Statewide Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement*, vol. VI, “Desolation Canyon WSA,” 26-27.

In November 2011, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar initiated the third stage of the process and recommended the Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Area to President Barack Obama as suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. It is now up to President Obama to decide whether to recommend the Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Area to Congress. Then Congress will *either* designate the Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Area as wilderness and a part of the National Wilderness Preservation System *or* it will return the Wilderness Study Area to the Bureau of Land Management for other multiple-use development.⁴⁵ Until President Obama recommends to Congress and Congress makes a decision, the Wilderness Study Area remains protected as legal wilderness and the Bureau of Land Management has to manage it in order to protect the wilderness characteristics of Deso.⁴⁶ Desolation Canyon is located smack in the middle of the booming oil shale and natural gas fields of the Uinta Basin and so it is probable that Desolation Canyon could lose its wilderness protection as the local counties and our nation as a whole decide that these extractive industries and goods are more important than land permanently protected as wilderness.

⁴⁴ *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, § 603.

⁴⁵ Bureau of Land Management, *Statewide Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement*, vol. VI, “Desolation Canyon WSA,” 29; Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior, *Preliminary Report on Bureau of Land Management Lands Deserving Protection as National Conservation Areas, Wilderness or Other Conservation Designations*, press release, November 2011, 21. <http://www.doi.gov/news/pressreleases/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=267130>.

⁴⁶ This is upheld in *Parker v. United States*, 309 F.Supp. 593, 600 (D.Colo. 1970) which is discussed in more detail later in the paper.

CHAPTER 5

CONTESTED WILDERNESS: PERSONAL VALUES AND EXPERIENCED WILDERNESS

The eight-year battle for legal wilderness protection illustrates that the values surrounding wilderness were contested as it was being written and they continue to be contested now. The reason *The Wilderness Act* preserves untrammeled land but still permits mining can be seen as a compromise that enabled a very contentious bill to wend its way through both houses of Congress and be signed into law.¹ If personal wilderness values are whatever we, (you, me, the congressman from Pennsylvania) feel they are, and as such have more or less importance depending upon each person's story (their socioeconomic status, time spent fishing with Dad, or aversion to fresh air) then the apparent contradiction within the bill makes sense.² Personal wilderness values affect legal wilderness. There are, after all, people behind federal land use and wilderness decisions. They have to follow specific parameters while making their enforcement decisions, but each individual director makes specific calls based upon his or her personal values as well as the legal mandate.

¹ Thomas G. Smith, *Green Republican: John Saylor and the Preservation of America's Wilderness* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 177-178.

² As an example of how a single member of Congress can play a pivotal role in the passage of an Act, see Smith, *Green Republican*, Chapter 9, "Passage of the Wilderness Bill."

Wilderness cannot exist unless humans, you and I, assign it values. “Wilderness” is both personal and legal with legal “wilderness” protecting what mid-twentieth century Americans felt were important to protect. Ideas about wilderness can change, including those held by the people charged with enforcing *The Wilderness Act* and *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*’s wilderness mandate. On the one hand, this means that a part of federal wilderness can smooth down according to the sandstone metaphor. But, because of their status as laws, there is inherent sharpness in *The Wilderness Act* and the Bureau of Land Management’s wilderness mandate. Those edges can be eroded slightly as a result of who is enforcing the law, but they remain.

The United States Forest Service in its *Wilderness Management* document defines these two types of wildernesses—personal and legal—as “sociological” and “legal” wilderness. “At one extreme,” state the authors of *Wilderness Management*, “wilderness can be defined in a narrow legal perspective as an area possessing qualities outlined in Section 2(c) of *The Wilderness Act*” (legal wilderness) and “at the other extreme, it is whatever people think it is; potentially, the entire universe, the *terra incognita* of people’s minds” (sociological wilderness). “There is little possibility,” the explanation continues, “of deriving a universally accepted definition of sociological wilderness because perceptions of wilderness vary widely.”³

While the *Wilderness Handbook* uses the term “sociological,” I prefer “experienced” wilderness to describe one’s personal wilderness values. The legal wilderness set out by *The Wilderness Act* and the Bureau of Land Management’s

³ John C. Hendee, George H. Stankey, and Robert C. Lucas, *Wilderness Management*, Misc. Publication no. 1365 (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 1978), 9.

wilderness mandate creates a definition that land agencies and the public use to describe a very specific type of federal land. Experienced wilderness acknowledges that there is more to wilderness than this legal definition and that what each individual thinks wilderness is reflects their unique social context as well as how they have interacted with wilderness type lands. It is the collection of values that, for each of us, makes up our own idea of wilderness. Experienced wilderness is what we value about wilderness and is all the infinite possibilities of what you and I think wilderness means: why it should be protected, why it is valuable, why it is important on so many different, personal levels. Because experienced wilderness belongs to each person individually, there are varying definitions.⁴ This is why experienced wilderness is so expansive in its definition.

⁴ Today these include, but are certainly not limited to benefits to the environment (natural resource, hunting, and medicinal reserves; CO₂ storage; places for scientific inquiry and study; locations set aside as a standard for land health) and benefits to humans (as a place to restore mental and physical health; find religious, spiritual, or psychological renewal; to learn about self, culture, and society; to find beauty and provide a place for stories to begin). Michael P. Nelson, "An Amalgamation of Wilderness Preservation Arguments," in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 191.

CHAPTER 6

CREATING PLACE: DESOLATION CANYON AND MY EXPERIENCED WILDERNESS

I had been down Deso before, but during the summer of 2011, I ran the river three times. Before those trips, Deso was just another beautiful canyon system framing the Green River. The repeated trips, however, changed my relationship with the place. I learned the river—saw it morph through the changing of the seasons from spring to summer to fall, high water to low—and Deso became more than just another river section. I learned its smells, color scheme, and temperament. I found rocks as I bounced off them with my boat and stumbled into and over them on hikes. I discovered granaries while hiking, beaver while rowing, and dreams while sleeping. This tactile, in depth knowledge of the canyon turned Deso from a landscape with which I was familiar into a place that I defined as home and defined me as a person.¹ As Deso changed into place, my place, I realized that what was also changing was my own experienced wilderness idea.

¹ See Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 7-8 for a discussion of experienced landscape and a sense of place; also Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Walden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) for an overall discussion of sense of place.

CHAPTER 7

CREATING CONNECTIONS: THE EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL PIECES OF DESOLATION CANYON

Upon arrival at a river trip put-in, there are exactly two things to do: rig your boat and leave, rowing downstream to shade, sandy beaches, and cottonwood trees. Rigging boats at the start of the trip is always quite chaotic: trailers are backing up vying for the best spot to unload gear and sprawl, generators and engines are chugging and electric blowers are shrieking as they inflate rubber rafts, people divide gear and supplies between boats. Often this is the first part of a boater's vacation: the beer is flowing, sometimes the music is playing, and people are shouting and joking. The fun has begun. The focus is usually more on the getting there than the there itself, and the celebration is of the start of the trip with no thought as to where that trip will go. Thoughts of canyons, cliffs, and camps, of hikes, wildlife, and weather usually come with the first strokes that finally row the boat away from the boat ramp and into the current. But my trip was different. There was no chatter or chaos, no generators or loud laughing as I gathered my gear and rigged my boat. My trip was a wilderness exploration, so I embarked alone and in the off-season with a winter storm looming.¹

¹ Most rivers managed by government agencies (Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, National Park Service) are permitted. This means that in order to run the river a river running party must have a permit from the appropriate government agency. Usually, these permits are awarded on a first-come, first-served or lottery basis. When demand is at its peak (May-August) it is considered the "season" or "high-use season." When demand is lower (September-April) that season is considered the "off-season."

Much more than the Bureau of Land Management's Federal Land Policy and Management Act or *The Wilderness Act* made my trip possible. I have benefited from an intellectual and skills knowledge foundation that has trickled down from both sides of my family. I learned the importance of protected land as a result of GrandRuth's and Dutch's (my dad's parents) involvement with the Sierra Club as it moved away from pack-trips and Sierra Nevada expeditions and into a true activism group. My love of rivers grew out of those early Sierra Club river trips down the rivers of the Colorado River drainage system that the Sierra Club fought so hard for. I absorbed the importance of camping and learning an area through repeated visits from stories of my mom's parents, Boppa and Phyllis. Boppa and Phyllis used to go to the same campground with the same people every year, as my mom was growing up. Those repeated visits are how a sense of place grows. When my mom was a Girl Scout and Girl Scout leader, she had to learn plants and animals and be able to teach those differences and identify them in the wild. Listening to those stories and combining them with her parent's love of birds, I realized that wilderness is not exclusively for my benefit but instead is also habitat for its native species, plants and animals. My dad taught me how to row boats and turned that love of river into something more concrete, a tactile knowledge of self and surroundings as he filled my library full of books on the American West and the Colorado River drainage system. It is because of my family that I was able to find my way to and through Deso.

As I rowed away from the put-in and really started to look down canyon I began to think about the place I would be traveling through: the canyon walls; the abandoned mining claims, dam sites, and homesteads; the animals and plants I might or might not see—the physical components of Deso. Percolating up through these initial strokes were

thoughts of solitude and beauty, silence and observation, testing of self and place—the emotional components of Desolation.

CHAPTER 8

THE MEANING OF LONELY

I got to Sand Wash today, rigged my boat and loaded it alone. Every sound causes me to pause and listen: a single bird trilling in the willows along the river, a trailer coming down the road with its brakes and tires squeaking, a fish jumping, the sound of a wild horse braying across the river on the ridge somewhere. Each sound elicits a pause. I am not sure if the pause is one of contemplation or panic. Am I listening because I am alone or am I listening because these are the only sounds around: me, the river, the land? Is this what it is like to be lonely, to take comfort in sounds because they are reminders of something other than self? I wonder how much of this I would notice if I were with others, even just one other person.

What is the meaning of lonely (see Figure 8.1)? There is the definition and then there is travelling by oneself through a desert canyon in the fall. I am alone; yet I am not lonely. I am a “being without company” but I do not feel cut off from others. I am not sad; this was my choice. I do not feel bleak even as I travel through the canyon of Desolation.



Figure 8.1. A Being Without Company.
Photograph by Alison Holland.

CHAPTER 9

BUMPING INTO THOUGHTS: INTERNAL REFLECTIONS

The reflections of the canyon walls on the river are amazing this morning. The combination of fast moving storm clouds, no wind, and breaks of sun between the passing clouds are spectacular.

I am all bundled up and drinking coffee from my thermos.

I have placed my boat in the current and am letting it roam.

The BLM Ranger, Jim, who launched on the same day as I, suggested for all solo morning floats to “just push off and drink coffee and see what you bump into.” So far, I am only bumping into thoughts. This goes against Jim’s admonition against thinking and if I do to “think about baseball.” Since I don’t know anything about baseball, I suppose that means I would think about nothing.

As I float down stream picking my way through rocks and waves—trying to outsmart the current without getting wet—I am filled with an overwhelming sense of privilege and gratitude.

I get to come here.

I get to float this section of river.

I get to see people or not, talk or not, sit in the sun or not.

Because of *The Wilderness Act*, I get this opportunity. One does not have to choose to be alone with only thoughts, paper and pen, and a box of books for company, but I do and I can.

This for me is the true meaning of those cliff reflections on the glassy Green River (see Figure 9.1). The silence, the solitude, the landscape allow me to see the reflections of the canyon and then look inside me, my body, my ideas, my family, my place.



Figure 9.1. Morning Reflections.
Photograph by Alison Holland

CHAPTER 10

HOW OUGHT I TO LIVE? A WILDERNESS

MEDITATION

When I row down canyon I look forward to see what to avoid and where to go, and up and out to remove myself from place. I am most drawn to where rock meets sky; where cliffs top out and only blue is left. I look for irregularities; peek holes into the unknown.

Trees meet sky and process carbon dioxide and produce oxygen. Rocks meet sky and openings—arches and holes—appear allowing a glimpse of the beyond. Red rock meets blue sky in the truest form of complimentary colors. My eyes pierce beyond all that. I start to think about a question Emerson posed to Thoreau: “how ought I to live?” A simple question at first ponder but with a deep breath, not so simple an answer.

How: a way in which one does things.

Ought: the proper, appropriate, true way of doing something.

I: me, you, each individual.

To live: to eat, sleep, love, breathe, explore.

How ought I to live? A question with deeply individual answers—not unlike wilderness—but whose answer appears in that glimpse beyond the rock cliff into blue above, the blues beyond.

And this is where wilderness comes in. Is it possible that one reason for protecting wilderness is to allow a person the ability to leave home—the known ideas, people, and comfort that define home—and instead go into a place where one is confronted with something more basic—eating, finding a warm, dry place to sleep, hiding from the rain. Then one can return home (with the comforts and more nuanced problems that go along with that) with a fresh look on life, a perspective based upon and drawn from the wilderness passed through, the cold sleepless nights, the simple and satisfying meals.

CHAPTER 11

WILDERNESS PURITY: SOLITUDE AND ITS LIMITS

There is something to be said about hiking up a drainage along a river corridor as heavily visited as Desolation and not seeing anything but my own footprints to indicate that people have been here before.

Even as I write this, I know it to be false. I know of the arch I am hiking up to see from a letter that a former Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation wrote to Martin Litton telling him about it in 1969.¹ I hiked about half way up to the arch already this season with Ranger Dave of the Bureau of Land Management. At the mouth of the canyon are Fremont Indian petroglyphs (see Figure 11.1) along with more modern additions—“Jack 11-99” and a cross etched into the stone. But in the freshly flashed drainage of Big Canyon, all I encounter are my footprints and the fresh prints of bighorn sheep and the escapees of the farms and ranches on the Ute Reservation up canyon: steers and horses.

As I write the scent of manure wafts by.

Hiking up Big Canyon I find the arch that the Commissioner wrote about (see Figure 11.2) and, looking up at it, I decide to see if I can get to it. I scramble up the scree

¹ R. P. Marean, Bureau of Reclamation, Montrose, Colorado, to C. Martin Litton, Portola Valley, California, June 6, 1969. Reprinted in *Boatman's Quarterly Review*, Summer 2011, 10-11.



Figure 11.1. Fremont Indian Petroglyph.
This petroglyph is found at the mouth of Big Canyon, a tributary canyon
of Desolation Canyon.
Photograph by Alison Holland

slope to a point where I find a rock outcropping with a view and a ledge with an old juniper tree leaning against it. The juniper trunk has been resting in this place a while. It is the aged silver grey of trees once they have weathered in the dry desert air and won't be disintegrating any further until some silly girl traveling alone steps on the wrong Y in the trunk and breaks the trunk down into smaller pieces which in turn break down further with the upcoming winter weather. While tempting, I decide to let well enough alone and stop. The completion of this journey can wait until I come back with others.

It is tempting to treat a solo journey like I would any other river trip, but it is different. What I get myself into, I must be able to get myself out of. Nobody knows



Figure 11.2. Big Canyon Arch.
Photograph by Alison Holland

exactly where I am or that I am scrambling up the side of Big Canyon. While I do have a satellite phone I did not bring it with me on the hike, just a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, an apple, water, my journal, and camera.

And so I end my approach and decide to have lunch. Looking up the drainage from my perch while eating my sandwich I see half an elk shed and two mustangs. Grazing, the mustangs turn and look down canyon toward me when I move or make a sound or drop small stones to test their attention. I don't think they see me, but they know something is up on the canyon wall and we spend our lunch wondering what the other is up to.

CHAPTER 12

WILDERNESS CONTRADICTIONS:

EXPERIENCING WILDERNESS

WITH OTHERS

I see two other people on my trip, both Bureau of Land Management employees patrolling the river. No matter who you are, when boating solo safety is a concern. So I catch up with them to run the three major rapids of the trip: Joe Hutch, Wire Fence, and Three Fords.

The rapids, class II and III, were not especially tricky that day but it was a minor relief to be running with others. In the few big waves, it was easier to T-up and hit them head on instead of skirting the rapids and taking a more conservative route. For the first time in days, I was able to relax a little. If I got stuck, I had friends to help me off rocks. If I wanted to shout with enthusiasm over a good run, then there were people to whoop and holler with. I experienced such a palpable release of tension sharing the day with others—the sun's reflection on the water, running the rapids—that I decided to camp with the rangers that night.

But how is this a solitary wilderness experience? Was I missing the full experience of a solo trip because I was going to have prolonged contact with another group instead of just passing and saying hello?

Wilderness does not require solitude but it provides for those opportunities. I

spent seven of eight days alone. Drinking whiskey and sharing stories around the camp fire with friends this night made me that much more present in the solitude of the next.

CHAPTER 13

MUSHROOM ROCK CAMP: OH, THE WIND

AND THE RAIN

Today was a doozy. In the early ideas of wilderness it was generally accepted that part of the wilderness deal was beauty and part was a test or testing of one's self and skills.¹ Today qualified: it has either rained, threatened rain, or been sunny. The wind has gusted with irregular ferocity, typical for a fall easing into winter storm.

After reveling in and writing about the glassy, calm water this morning, I started to row downstream. I wanted to cover twelve to fifteen miles and I knew that today it was going to rain. Sure enough, just about the minute I put my notebook away, it began to pour. For seven miles. The longer it rained the colder it got. Not just because I was getting more and more wet (through raincoat, paddle pants, and ditch-boots), but because this was the storm that brought the first snow of the year to my home in Park City. While it didn't snow on the river, it got very soggy, wet, dreary, and cold. I would row fifty strokes and put my hands in my fuzzy hand-warmer life jacket pockets, warm them until I could feel the tips of my fingers again and repeat: fifty strokes, lose feeling in my fingers,

¹ Nash discusses part of the societal changes that led to *The Wilderness Act*. Specifically he discusses the rise of outdoor clubs like the Boone and Crockett club in the early twentieth century where "part of the value of a wilderness trip was masochistic in that it provided a chance to play the savage, accept punishment, struggle, and, hopefully, triumph over the forces of raw nature." Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 154.

warm fingers; fifty strokes, lose feeling in my fingers, warm fingers; repeat. At one point I even lost all feeling in my baby toes.

My goal was to camp at the Mushroom Rock Camp (see Figure 13.1), so I continued on. Mushroom Rock has a grove of tall cottonwoods as well as wide-open spaces. If it was raining I could cook under the protection of the trees and if sunny I could warm up and dry out all my stuff. And I wanted to hike up Lunts Horse Pasture Canyon, which is accessible from camp.



Figure 13.1. Mushroom Rock.
Photograph by Alison Holland

As I rowed around the bend into the tight canyon section about five miles above Mushroom Rock the rain stopped, the clouds rose, and the overall tone of the canyon lightened and became less oppressive. Cliff walls transformed from dull brown and grey to red, orange, and brown with grey stripes and green juniper trees accentuating the ridges and topography of the rising canyon walls (see Figure 13.2). Couple that almost sun with a tiny bit of wind, just a breeze really, and I realized that this was the moment to do a layer switch out. In about five minutes I went from soggy and wet, to naked, to totally dry with all my wet clothes draped over every available surface on my boat, drying out. I let my clothes and body collect as much solar heat as possible. Between the wind and the sun's rays (which grew stronger by the minute) my clothes were all dry by the time I made it to camp in the brilliant sun.

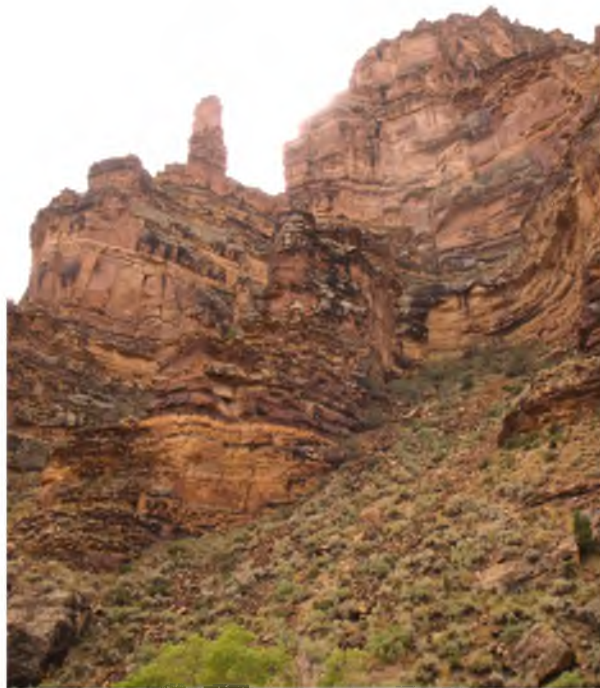


Figure 13.2. Lighthouse Rock.
Photograph by Alison Holland.

CHAPTER 14

LUNTS HORSE PASTURE CANYON: AN EVENING WANDER

I hiked about a mile or two up Lunts Horse Pasture canyon to the confluence with a side canyon on river right. Both Lunts Horse Pasture canyon and the side canyon had flashed recently and the deposits at the confluence were revealing. The side canyon on the right had spit out almost a foot and a half tall alluvial fan into the stream draining Lunts Horse Pasture canyon. As the side canyon water slowed its flow at the confluence, it dropped the major portion of its sediment load. The size of the pebbles deposited were telling: right canyon palm sized, left canyon thumbnail size. The canyon on the left, Lunts Horse Pasture, had run longer and bigger carrying its fist sized pebbles farther downstream before depositing them.

As I walked up the canyon I found myself searching. Why else would a person head up a canyon with no trail and no knowledge of what lay ahead? I was looking for something, something big and noteworthy. It is always nice to stumble upon things while hiking in the desert: granaries, arches, big horn sheep.

Instead, what I found was evidence of a recently flashed stream: debris trapped around willow stalks, against boulders, and in and among driftwood piles that had been carried downstream in this flood and previous ones (see Figure 14.1); a boulder and cliff wall eroding out and around pebble sized intrusions leaving the pebbles paving the



Figure 14.1. Lunts Horse Pasture Flood Debris
Photograph by Alison Holland

ground; coyote poop and a fresh mountain lion print; and a slow shadow growing as the sun set on the canyon walls reminding me that it was time to return to camp for more clothing and dinner.

While I was hoping for the big and stunning it was what I did not see that was important. I did not see another human footprint. I did not see any trash that had been carried downstream. I did not follow a trail. I chose to walk up a wash to see what I could see and I found the arrival of evening and a quiet peace born of solitude.

CHAPTER 15

ROCK CREEK RANCH: A GLIMPSE OF THE WILD

I saw a bald eagle as I rowed by Rock Creek Ranch. I was looking elsewhere—at the ranch, at the cottonwoods, at the rocks, at the sky—when I caught a glimpse of white set against a moving shadow. I must have disturbed the eagle from its perch in the cottonwoods and it flew downstream quickly. The shadow of its black wings would alternate between obvious and shimmering and hidden and black with the sun's reflection. Its head and tail only distinguishable as white against red cliffs.

Later that evening, looking up from the cookstove as I wait for my corn chowder to finish simmering in its hearty, golden goodness, I see an eagle pair cruising at the top of the cliffs in the last departing rays of sun. I wonder if one of this pair is the eagle from Rock Creek. They were far enough away that I only saw their black shape, but they were soaring and they were not turkey vultures or ravens or hawks. Eagles soaring in the setting sun are the only viable option.

CHAPTER 16

INHABITING THE WILDERNESS: BECOMING

ONE WITH PLACE

As I float downstream I am struck by sound. With no one else around, the only sounds are those of me, my boat and gear, and my surroundings: oars in oar locks—clunk, skim, drip, clunk, over and over and over, downstream one stroke at a time; fabric rubbing against fabric as the sleeves of my rain coat brush against my life jacket—a hard swish and crackle born from the petroleum base of the two plastic jackets; waves splashing against the prow of my boat—a hollow thump, followed by a sploosh as the water runs into and down the rubber bottom, and the drip of the water then flowing back into the river whence it came; far downstream, the wind inhaling and the trees shaking as it prepares to blow up to me—like the rise in breath of a sharp inhale heard across a room of sleeping people; and, depending on the course of the wind’s gusty inhale, the hum and buzz of flies and bugs in the willows and tamarisk on the river banks, nowhere near as loud and piercing as in the summer, but still there.

The sounds remind me that the bugs are out, the river is flowing, I am here, and life continues to meander downstream—an audible grounding into and born of place. My sounds are not separate from the system I travel through. I have become one with my surroundings.

CHAPTER 17

SNAP CANYON: STUMBLING UPON MAN

In a brief moment of sun peeking through the storm clouds I take a walk and follow the sunlight up and to the top of the old Snap Canyon creek bed. What remains of the creek bed is covered with sagebrush, elk poop, and cactus all tucked into knee-high grasses. I definitely had to watch where I was going. I soaked in some sun—the first in a few days of rain and clouds—and absorbed my surroundings before turning back down the hill towards the cottonwoods just behind my camp. As I entered the grove I notice the grass at the base of a big stately cottonwood (still hanging on despite the fact that the river has not been that high in years). It was flat—not beat down, just flattened from years of trampling. Probably, I thought, from when this used to be a more popular camp, before whichever Snap Canyon flash flood rendered it smaller, steeper and rockier. I look around and am surprised to see what looks like a chunk of old railroad tie. We are a long ways downstream or upstream from any current or past railroad tracks, think Green River, Wyoming, and Green River, Utah. I am further surprised to see myself encircled by old, collapsed, silver-grey cottonwood branches. The flat spot is actually what is left of a corral, and in the center, hidden in the grasses, a pile of rusted-out iron something or other.

In “The Preservation of Wilderness,” environmental philosopher Mark Woods writes, “human impact to one degree or another exists virtually everywhere upon the

Earth. If we are to have any legally designated wilderness areas, then we must choose among the types and degrees of actual human imprints that will disqualify an area for wilderness designation and those that will be ignored and regarded as consistent with a naturalness requirement of wilderness.¹ Hidden behind the Snap Canyon Camp beach, in the trees, within the Wilderness Study Area, is man. His trammeling. His refuse.

¹ Mark Woods, "Federal Wilderness Preservation in the United States: The Preservation of Wilderness?" in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 140.

CHAPTER 18

RANGE CREEK: EXPLORING THE WILDERNESS BOUNDARY

I have hiked two and a half miles up Range Creek to the recently revised Wilderness Study Area boundary. I knew that the boundary had been changed—one of the river rangers had hiked up and checked it out. He told me that it looked like a giant parking lot flanked by huge boulders and rocks leading folks into the area, like landing lights on an airplane runway. So, in theory, I was prepared.¹

I say “recently revised” because the School Institutional Trust Lands Administration informed the Bureau of Land Management in Price, Utah (the Bureau of Land Management office overseeing the Range Creek wilderness boundary) that their measurements were off by approximately ten to thirty feet and so they were illegally keeping ATV, dirt biker, and other OHV users from ten feet of land that they should legally be allowed to recreate on.² Large equipment was okayed to go out, remove the cement and steel posts and steel cable that served as the “border” between wilderness lands and Bureau of Land Management lands open to all. What remains is a huge scar in

¹ The details of this section are from a conversation with Bureau of Land Management River Ranger Dave Kelly, 4 October 2011.

² The School Institutional Trust Lands Administration is “an administration and board” mandated by the Utah Constitution “to manage lands that Congress granted to the state for the support of common schools and other beneficiary institutions,” “School and Institutional Trust Lands Management Act,” Utah Code 53C-1-102(1)(a), 1994.

the earth and the sign alerting people of the wilderness study area and informing users that they cannot use motorized vehicles beyond that point see Figure 18.1). In case you were wondering where the fence used to be, the bare earth will let you know. Somebody had resurveyed the border and there are six green fence posts with orange survey tape crossing the flat expanse and the creek bottom and climbing up the hills to a place, I can only guess, someone decided that even modern, more powerful OHVs couldn't get up.

A mixture of disgust, distress, and disappointment coursed through me as I slowly walked up the stream and the new scar came into sight. I had followed the tracks of others up the creek: a solitary dirt biker's tire tracks, a mountain lion's fresh prints. I knew that whatever barrier was in place it was at least penetrable by a dirt biker and a mountain lion. But there was no barrier. Nothing, in fact, except a feeble reminder in polite Bureau of Land Management terms not to cross the line and some fence posts, the



Figure 18.1. Boundary Revision Scars.
Photograph by Alison Holland.

green, steel T-post kind that you drive in with a fence post driver; fence posts that can be removed, run over, or, since they were spaced so far apart, driven right between (see Figure 18.2). Now, it would a great thing if a person respected a boundary line without crossing over it, but that is not the case in the battle between wilderness and ATV/OHV users; between both poles of a very polar argument.

And so I sit and stew. Why does life in this West have to be so polarized? It is ATVs or wilderness; it is native fish or hydro-power; humans or animals; livestock or big horn sheep. It seems I live in a land of poles, right and wrong, my way or no way.



Figure 18.2. Trampled Boundary Marker.
Photograph by Alison Holland

Is this how I ought to live? Walking a line between family and friend, between ethical rights (born from how one was raised and entirely subject to human thoughts, ideas, nature), between myself and my beliefs and something bigger? What is that something bigger? One possibility for wilderness is as a place of spiritual searching after all.

I turn my back on the scar and place myself on a rock in the middle of the creek and look into a corner of the non-wilderness land that is steep and rocky with juniper trees cresting the cliff tops; where the cottonwoods are changing color next to the creek and chunks of rock have fallen in various losing battles against gravity and erosion. It is beautiful and it is not legal wilderness. That is okay. What is not okay is the huge scar ripped into the earth directly behind me. This corner, from peripheral to peripheral is upstream of the newly surveyed Wilderness Study Area line, but you wouldn't know it *without* the boundary line pointed out for you.

I continue looking and notice that there is evidence of a recent flash flood. I remember all that evidence too as I walked up the creek. Rarely did I notice tracks other than the mountain lion and the mule deer it was stalking. On the right side of the creek the flashing water had lapped at the newly placed boulders. There are new ant holes forming in the disturbed dirt. In not too long Range Creek *will* re-inhabit this place. My hope is that wilderness will persevere here until that time, that oil will get so expensive as to render OHV use moot and the nonnative, invasive species will leave the natives a little room to grow.

I continue to explore the non-wilderness portion as I hike up the road that follows Range Creek. I follow the bear tracks that I picked up in the middle of the scar at the

boundary. They emerged out of the grassy flatlands in the open area just downstream of the newly revised border.

Together the bear prints and I follow the road (see Figure 18.3) through an old homestead where only the concrete pad of a house and forgotten items are left: a child's boot, an empty can of Olympia beer, two heels from a women's pair of shoes, a fridge on its side, open and rusting, some glass jars, an old chimney with outside grill, a green shotgun shell. We walked through a fresh burn where cottonwood trees were black in majesty with their singed souls escaping through the golden cracks of the burnt trunks.



Figure 18.3. Bear Tracks, Range Creek.
Photograph by Alison Holland.

The bear's tracks avoided the same mud puddles I did and veered off in surprise similarly to mine when the sand was suddenly softer, muddier, or otherwise different. The bear, like me, almost seemed to approach the scar out of curiosity and then immediately continued on up the trail that had been newly flattened, enlarged, and otherwise improved. As if, like me, she needed to center herself back in landscape, in place.

The bear just passed through the area. It is very hard to not fall into an anthropomorphizing trap when looking at the bear prints crossing the bare, scarred earth. Maybe the bear paused and shook her head in confusion and acceptance and continued with whatever chore or purpose she had before.

The bear was walking up the road. A road placed in landscape becomes useful not just for ATVs or my walking shoes. It becomes an opening, an enlarged and useful game trail for the other members of the ecosystem. The bear and mountain lion whose prints I crisscrossed used the road like we might use a game trail when hiking far away from trails in the wilderness. It is a windfall, a moment to rest and just walk, not worry about where one is going or what the next path might be.

What is most important to me is that the bear, the wild animal, passed through the scar and continued on. What happens to bear, to mountain lion, to Range Creek itself depends upon how we as humans affect our surroundings. Between federal rules and human failings, the Bureau of Land Management created a huge rip in the system of Range Creek. How the Bureau of Land Management, wilderness, and off-road activists work out the new boundary will determine how much bear shakes her head as her daily or weekly wanderings bring her through the newly created parking lot at the Wilderness Study Area border.

At the entrance to the Lower Wilcox ranch, about three and a half miles upstream from the wilderness border, I turned around and returned to camp. The sun was starting to drop and along with it the temperature. The bear prints continued on.

I kept my shoes on as I followed the bear, but next time I should like to walk barefoot in the prints of the bear. I am not looking for the bears' truth so much as I want to retain, discover, celebrate the connection of two animals walking the same path for probably very different reasons but both for reasons that the road, the riparian system, the canyon provides for. Who knows, maybe the bear was just going on an afternoon stroll through the canyon too?

CHAPTER 19

MAN AND WILDERNESS; WILDERNESS

AND MAN

As I float downstream towards the end of my journey I see more and more evidence of man: the old juniper tree limbs that have been turned into fence posts, long retired from the cattle business, in disrepair and out of use; the rock cairns in unusual spots atop cliffs that boaters are unlikely to have hiked up to build. Following the river is a “pack road,” according to the map, that correlates to the Coal Creek Dam site—built by hand, the road structure is still visible to the observant floater, a patchwork of rocks tucked into crevasses evening out the topography.¹ It is tempting to look at these creations and determine that I am not in wilderness. That these human made improvements (the remnants of an effort to tame the land in order to make a hardscrabble living) remove, in fact render impossible, the wilderness qualities of the landscape. This is what the Forest Service was aiming for with the purity definition.

Parker v. United States reaffirmed wilderness is a human creation, a human definition and as such, humans will be present within it.² Legal wilderness is there

¹ Duwain Whitis, *Guide to the Green River in Desolation and Gray Canyons* (Buda, Texas: RiverMaps, LLC., 2009), mile 25.8, left note associated with Map 10.

² *Parker v. United States*, 309 F.Supp. 593, 600 (D.Colo. 1970).

because we—you, me, Congress—decided that it had meaning and was necessary. Without civilization, knowledge, language, the need and desire of something else to balance the modern living situation, there would be no wilderness. Deso no longer lives this life of extraction but the remnants are still present.

Mostly determined by those in Congress in 1964, the legal wilderness protection created by *The Wilderness Act* protects certain lands that those in the 1960s felt were important to protect, those lands that they felt embodied their personal value judgments about wilderness.³ While this approach can seem limiting, it is also open to interpretation. By not dictating how the Act should be enacted, the framers of *The Wilderness Act* (and subsequently *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*) left it open ended. As long as wilderness areas could fit into the framework, future federal land managers, Presidents, and Congresses could make their choices. Michael P. Cohen writes in “Resistance to Wilderness” that “when men of my father’s generation decided to think and act toward the land according to a concept they wrote as wilderness, they might have done better if they had been more inclusive, more knowledgeable, and more subtle, and they might have done worse.”⁴ Regardless of what they may have missed, their creation has the power and protection of law and is what we work with now.

Wilderness protection guarantees that we do not change all land and that there will be land to go explore and escape into. Yes, wilderness, like most things society encounters, is a human creation. The construction of an area of land that is both beyond us and entirely dependent upon us, however, means that we have a place to go. A place to

³ Michael P. Cohen, “Resistance to Wilderness,” *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (January 1996): 33-42.

⁴ Cohen, “Resistance to Wilderness,” 42.

find out how to continue as members of our society. Cohen elaborates on Thoreau's statement that "in wildness is the preservation of the world,' ... *because* we draw our nourishment and vigor from natural forces in places beyond us."⁵

There is no true, one meaning of wilderness. But a definition of wilderness matters because that is how we, as humans, as a society, determine how we are supposed to act towards a specific type of landscape. While "much of the American landscape has been modified to some degree"⁶ wilderness protection, in Roderick Nash's words, "keep[s] human hands off of some environments [and] demonstrates an encouraging capacity for self-restraint on the part of a species notorious for its excesses and greed."⁷

⁵ Cohen, "Resistance to Wilderness," 42.

⁶ Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 379.

⁷ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 388.

CHAPTER 20

WILDERNESS: CREATING PLACE

These thoughts are like the initial color changes on the cottonwoods down here in the canyon: one clump of shimmering, golden leaves in a sea of green; one clump of coherent words among the jumbled thoughts of my brain. The cottonwoods continue to change, my experienced wilderness continues to define itself. There are so many definitions of, so many nuances to, wilderness. I went on my own wilderness journey and my knowledge of wilderness grew from a fairly in-depth survey of the subject of wilderness to a definition, a personal belief, of what makes wilderness for *me*.

My journey satisfied *The Wilderness Act*'s requirements for wilderness on some levels. I travelled alone. I did not have a motor and was propelled downstream only by the power of the river, two oars, and my own strength. For the most part, most days in fact, I saw no humans nor evidence of them. I was in a primitive area. All of this is reinforced by the fact that most of my journey was through the officially designated Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Area.

And yet, each of my wilderness points has a counter, a reason why my trip, according to some, should not be considered a wilderness experience. I had no motor, but I carried a satellite phone for emergencies. I left my computer but brought my iPod in case of total loneliness. I brought ice, food, a stove, Jack Daniel's, a box to poop in—an

unending list of things to make my experience comfortable and safe, while still alone. Yet these things I brought with me, they are only part of what determines my wilderness.

I saw animals and plants in their homes—native species in their native places. I suffered through cold, soaking rainstorms with nowhere to hide or escape. I had time and energy to contemplate questions, relationships, self, place. I learned the difference between solitude and loneliness. I discovered anger and found peace. I acknowledged and defined my love of a river and canyon.

A familiarity of place, of land, can be gained most anywhere a person recognizes an attachment. Anybody can have feelings about landscape and a resulting love of place. But a familiarity with wilderness, my definition of wilderness, was, *is*, contingent upon legal wilderness designation and protection. Land protected as legal wilderness is land that can be explored and redefined. Land preserved as legal wilderness provides an opportunity to fully learn a landscape. Land preserved is land that can be searched and explored. Wilderness allows contemplation, survival, and clarity.

Wilderness protection limits what can and cannot be done in and on certain areas of land. Because of these limitations solitude, study, and slow travel are emphasized while the extractive uses of the land—mining, grazing, etc.—are, for the most part, forced elsewhere. By limiting those uses, legal wilderness designation provides a very small fraction of the nation's public lands for slow and potentially solitary enjoyment.¹

¹ “Only about 4 percent of lands in the United States are protected as wilderness areas, and nearly 75 percent of such lands are in Alaska. The 413 wilderness areas in the lower forty-eight states makes up about 1.8 percent of all land and are mainly small parcels of land (only four are larger than 1,500 square miles.” For the BLM [Bureau of Land Management], that means that of the 267 million acres it oversees, 41% of all federal lands, only 5.1 million acres are managed as wilderness. Gary C. Bryner, *U.S. Land and Natural Resources Policy: A Public Issues Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 250, 243-244.

Wilderness does not need to be defined; it merely has to be accepted (see Figure 20.1). I won't ever know all the secrets of nature, of the cosmos, of god, of wilderness. But I can rest comfortably with the idea that I can go places and feel them, knock on the door, take a step into deeper meaning and then leave, smarter, more balanced, and more content than when I started. I don't really need a single definition, a one way. I like to dabble, a little from here, a little from there; a little of this idea, a little of that one; an intense and encompassing belief in the other: the universe, the wind, erosion, heart beats, the wild of my self and surroundings.



Figure 20.1. Confluence of Price River and Green River.
Photograph by Alison Holland.

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